



Census of Agriculture

United States Department of Agriculture

National Agricultural Statistics Service

Announcement

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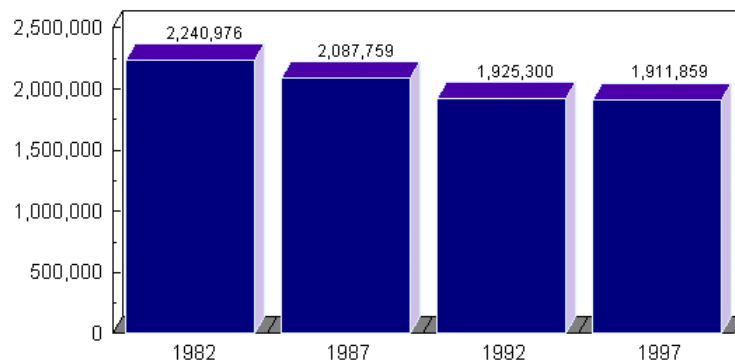
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Women in Agriculture

The 1997 Census of Agriculture reported that there were 165,102 female-operated farms in the United States - up 14% from 1992. This number represents 8.6 percent of all farms in the country.

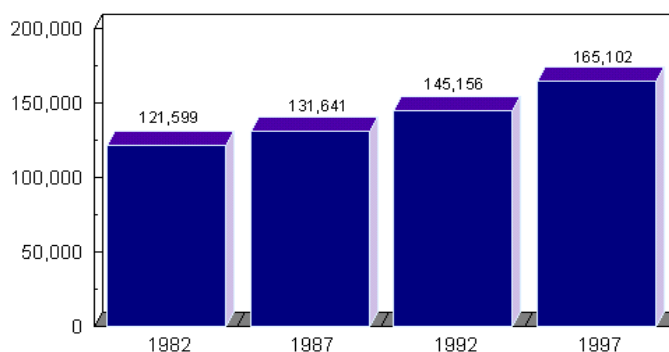
Figure 1. TOTAL FARMS IN THE UNITED STATES

The census of agriculture is the leading source of statistics about the United States agricultural production and operator characteristics. It is also the only source of consistent, comparable data at the county, State, and National levels.



Source: 1997 Census of Agriculture

Figure 2. FEMALE-OPERATED FARMS IN THE UNITED STATES

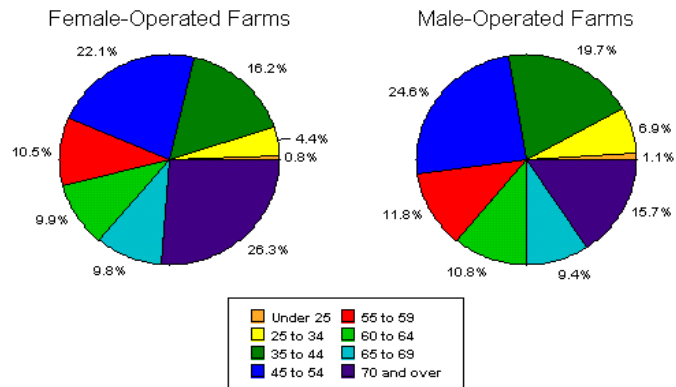


Source: 1997 Census of Agriculture

Looking at the graphics, we can review some of the numbers and develop a profile of female operators in American agriculture. The total number of farms decreased by nearly 15 percent from 1982 to 1997 (fig. 1) while the percentage of farms operated by females has been increasing (fig. 2).

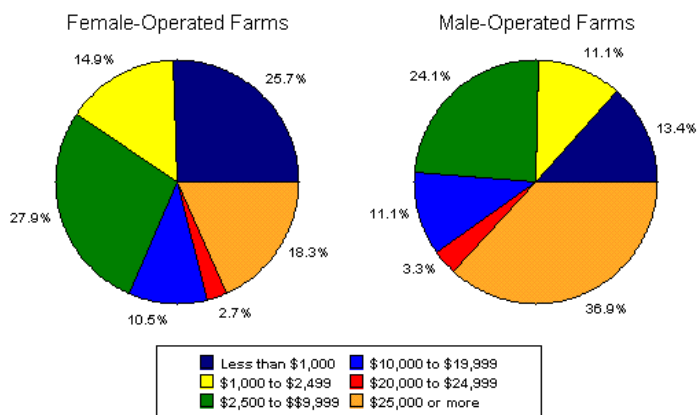
Does this mean that more women are entering into agriculture and making this their new occupation, or does it mean something else? Considering operator age by gender, (fig. 3) 36 percent of female farm operators are 65 years of age or older, with 26.3 percent being more than 70 years of age. These numbers probably illustrate that as the husband ages or dies, the wife takes control of the farm. While female-operated farms represent 8.6 percent of all farms, they only represent 3.6 percent of the value of agricultural products sold and control 5.4 percent of all the land in farms.

Figure 3. Age of Operator by Gender



Source: 1997 Census of Agriculture

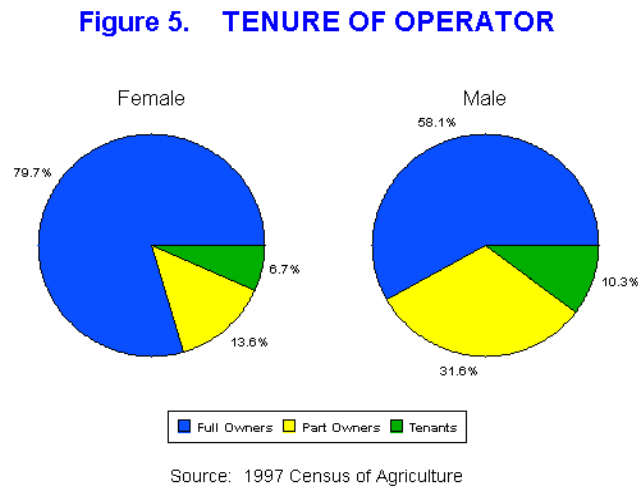
Figure 4. FARMS BY VALUE OF SALES



Source: 1997 Census of Agriculture

Women are best represented on livestock farms, and especially with livestock specialty operations such as goat or horse farms. They also tend to manage smaller farms in terms of both size and sales. For example, only 18.3 percent of women-operated farms had sales of more than \$25,000 as compared to 36.9 percent of their male counterparts (fig. 4). Although women operators tend to run smaller, more specialty operations, they are more likely to own their operation.

Nearly 80 percent of women operators fully own their farm or ranch, as compared to 58 percent of the men (fig. 5). Farming is the principal occupation of 45.5 percent of the women-operated farms as compared to 50.7 percent of the men.



While data seem to show that agriculture may be the most male-dominated profession in American, there are many questions about whether this portrayal is truly representative of women's role in farming. This also brings into discussion whether the single-operator concept as measured by the census has accurately measured changes in society.

The transfer of the census of agriculture program from the Bureau of the Census to the National Agricultural Statistics Service (NASS) now finally consolidates, within one Federal agency, the agricultural statistics program for the United States. This transfer occurred too late to make any significant changes to the 1997 Census of Agriculture. Looking into the future, the consolidation of the census of agriculture into NASS provides significant opportunities to eliminate duplication and redesign a census program to address new data concerns necessary to serve the needs and interests of all members of the agriculture community. A redesign of the census program to provide expanded data on the participation of women in United States agriculture will require a major support effort of interested groups to promote and build support for including new data items. Throughout the census process, NASS will consult and work closely with its Advisory Committee on Agriculture Statistics and other organizations for various redesign decisions. The purpose of this involvement is to ensure key issues covering new data needs on agriculture are reviewed to minimize respondent burden and provide useful, high-quality data. For the 2002 Census of Agriculture, the questionnaire has been re-engineered to provide data on multiple farm operators and thus providing more data on women's participation in agriculture.

REFERENCES

Reilly, Joseph T., Participation of Women in United States Agriculture (1999)

1997 Census of Agriculture, United States Volume I, Selected Characteristics of Farms by Sex of Operators